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ABSTRACT

Previous research on sexual harassment on college campuses identified a third category of respondent in addition to victims and harassers. These victim-harassers were individuals who both harassed others and who had been harassed themselves. Undergraduates (N=692) from three colleges completed questionnaires about their experience as victims and aggressors in campus sexual harassment. The results revealed that about one-fifth of the total sample had been victims, one-fifth had been harassers, one-fifth had been victim-harassers, and two-fifths had had no victimization experience. Most victims were females, most harassers were males, and victim-harassers were about evenly divided as to gender. Possible interpretations of the victim-harasser phenomenon include modeling, retaliation, identification with the aggressor, and misperception of one's own victimization experience as a way of rationalizing harassment of others. Differences among victimization rates on the three campuses are discussed. (Author/NB)

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Sexual harassment on three college campuses

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Abstract

Three undergraduate samples, a total of 692 college students, were administered questionnaires about their experience as victims and aggressors in campus sexual harassment. About one fifth of the total sample had been victims, one fifth had been harassers, one fifth had been victim-harassers, and two fifths had had no victimization experience. The meaning of being both a victim and a harasser is discussed, as well as differences between victimization rates on the three campuses.

Sexual Harassment on Three College Campuses

Statement of the Problem:

An earlier study of sexual harassment on the college campus (Sigal, Gibbs, Fox, Auerbach, & Novaky, 1986) found, among harassers and victims of sexual harassment, a new category previously unreported in the literature: victim-harassers, individuals who both harassesd others and had been harassed themselves. Victim-harassers differed from both victims and harassers in several ways. An extension of the study was conducted, reported here, on two additional college campuses, to ascertain if the category of victim-harasser had generality beyond the original sample. In addition, rates of harassment had appeared relatively low in the original sample, in relation to the amount of concern on the campus that harassment was a problem that needed to be addressed. Additional samples were sought for comparison purposes as to the relative seriousness of the harassment problem at other campuses.

Subjects:

Subjects were obtained from three northeastern institutions of higher learning. Institution A, reported on in Sigal et al.(1986), is a medium-sized university in a large metropolitan area. Many of the students commute, and the students are probably lower in socio-economic status

than in the other two samples.

At Institution A, 377 students were sampled, of whom 222 were female. The majority of subjects were obtained from a cross-section of classes in different subject areas. A smaller segment of the sample was obtained from administration to dormitory volunteers. No major differences in results were obtained between the two types of administration.

Institution B is a small institution in a rural area. At Institution B, questionnaires were distributed in a variety of settings to student volunteers. A total of 268 subjects completed the questionnaire, of whom 153 were female.

Institution C is another small institution in a rural area. At Institution C, questionnaires were distributed in classrooms. A total of 56 subjects completed the questionnaire, of whom 38 were female.

Procedure:

The questionnaire developed previously was presented to the new samples. The questionnaire consisted of four parts: demographic data; incidence and type of sexual harassment experienced on campus, as well as reactions; incidence and type of sexual harassment incidents in which the subject had been the aggressor; and vignettes describing one example of faculty and one example of peer harassment, after which

subjects indicated the amount of blame attached to both victim and aggressor for each of the vignettes.

Hypotheses in the study were that the victim-harasser category would emerge in the two new samples, and that, as in Sigal et al. (1985), victim-harassers would be more likely to be female than other harassers, and would be more likely to have experienced more victimizations than other victims.

Results:

Table 1 shows the proportion of victims, harassers, victim-harassers, and subjects with no victimization experience. A total of 21.8% of the sample had experienced sexual harassment, a total of 20.1% had carried out sexual harassment, and a separate group of 17.5% had been both victims and harassers. For Institution A, 9% of the sample were victim-harassers, for Institution B, 29%, and for Institution C, 18%. As expected, most victims were female (93%), most harassers were male (81%) and victim harassers were about evenly divided as to gender (57% female). It should be noted that 59% of the sample was female, so that the fore-mentioned percentages for the total sample slightly exaggerate the proportion of women involved.

The mean number of categories of victimization experienced checked by victims was 2.50; the mean number of categories of victimization experienced checked by

victim-harassers was 3.9. Victim-harassers experienced significantly more categories of harassment than did victims ($t[n=151] = 3.40$, $p < .001$).

Table 2 shows the percentage of the sample, divided into male and female, and contrasted by the three institutions, who experienced each of the categories of harassment mentioned in the questionnaire. It can be noted that across samples females experienced more of each category of harassment than males. It can also be noted that large variability existed between institutions in the incidence of harassment, with Institutions B and C apparently having more of a problem than Institution A.

Discussion and Conclusions:

As in the previous study, the category of victim-harasser emerged as an important one, with 17.5% of the sample belonging in it. The two new samples added in this study both had higher percentages of such individuals who have experienced harassment and also carried it out on others than was found in the previous sampling. As hypothesized, victim-harassers were more likely to be female than other harassers, and experienced more types of harassment than did other victims. Several possible interpretations of the victim-harasser phenomenon include modeling, retaliation, identification with the aggressor, and misperception of one's own victimization experience as a

way of rationalizing harassment of others. These interpretations are currently being explored in an interview study of victims, harassers and victim-harassers.

The large differences found between percentages of harassment in the three institutions is worthy of comment. Both Institutions B and C generally showed higher rates of victimization of women than did Institution A. This may be due to B and C having a smaller, more rural setting with a higher percentage of dormitory students; such a setting may lead to more peer pressure to engage in harassment behaviors. In addition, the metropolitan influence on A may result in more liberal, feminist attitudes. Higher status males at B and C, as compared to males at A, may feel more entitled to sexual dominance over females.

Institution B apparently has the most serious problem, with 8.5% of women saying they have been sexually assaulted, and 40.5% saying they have been victims of unvanted touching. The smaller sample at C makes inferences about incidence at that institution more difficult. The high rates for B could also be an artifact of the sampling, with B subjects having volunteered to complete the questionnaire and therefore possibly more involved in the issue. It should be noted that there were no major differences obtained in Sample A between volunteer and non-volunteer subjects.

Reference:

Sigal, J., Gibbs, M., Fox, M., Auerbach, D., & Novaky, D. (1986) Campus sexual harassment: Victims, harassers and victim-harassers. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Eastern Psychological Association.

Table 1

Percentages of Students in Categories of Harassment Experiences

	Victims	Harassers	Victim-Harassers	No Harassment Experience
Male	3.6	40.2	18.5	37.7
Female	34.3	6.3	16.8	42.6

Table 2

Percentage of Students in Each Category of Unwanted Sexual Experiences

	Proposition	Dirty Jokes	Obscenity	Touching
Male				
Inst A	4.7	1.3	2.0	4.0
Inst B	17.5	7.9	10.5	11.4
Inst C	0	6.7	13.3	6.7
Female				
Inst A	19.63	9.6	10.5	10.1
Inst B	44.4	17.0	24.8	46.5
Inst C	42.1	13.2	18.4	42.1

	Sexual Exposing	Sexual Assault	Questions & Comments	Persistent Phone Calls
Male				
A	2.7	2.7	2.7	5.3
B	.9	.9	8.8	3.5
C	0	0	6.7	13.3
Female				
A	1.8	1.8	8.7	10.9
B	8.5	8.5	37.3	10.5
C	0	0	10.5	7.9

	Sexual Body Language	Staring at Body Parts
Male		
A	2.7	0
B	11.4	10.5
C	6.7	0
Female		
A	10.1	.9
B	22.2	22.9
C	13.2	0